Homily of Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, 2026

Isaiah 8:3-9:3; Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17; Matthew 4:12-23

Zebulun and Naphtali were among the twelve tribes of Israel that settled in the region of Galilee. They were among the territories invaded and conquered by the Assyrians in 721 BC. The invaders, who were pagans, occupied Zebulun and Naphtali and integrated with the local people. The invaders' pagan religion became the dominant religion. A few Jews continued to worship the true God.

The history and the dominant pagan religion of Zebulun and Naphtali were the reasons Isaiah depicted the towns as "The people who walked in darkness" and "those who dwelt in a land of gloom." Galilee (which included lands of Zebulun and Naphtali) was one of the places Jesus performed his public ministry, fulfilling Isaiah's prophesy, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Upon those who lived in a land of gloom a light has shone" (Isaiah 9:1). The coming of Jesus would be the "a great light."

Today's Psalm (27), prays, "The Lord is my light and my salvation … The Lord is my refuge … I believe that I shall see the bounty of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord with courage; be stouthearted, and wait for the Lord." The words are spiritually reassuring and fortifying as we begin the new year.

We stand on the prophecies of Isaiah and the words of the psalmist and pray that whatever situation of darkness and gloom we are in, Jesus, our refuge and our salvation may shine his great light upon us. Amen.

Zebulun and Naphtali were people who walked in darkness and people who dwelt in a land of gloom because they did not worship the true God. The idolatry of the men and women of our generation is not necessarily the worship of pagan gods. It is the worship of worldly things: politics, business, economy, sports, science and technology, social activities, jobs, and so on. St. Paul, rightly, describes the world's paganism in the following words, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and revered and worshiped the creature rather than the creator …" (Romans 1:21-25).

In the second reading, we see that the Christian Corinthians were torn apart by division and rivalry. They were in different opposing camps: Paul's camp, Apollos's camp, Cephas' camp, and Christ's camp. The divisions and rivalries we see in our society, our country, and our world are the worst kinds of paganism. Despite the world's development, hate, divisions, rivalries, violence, wars, bloodshed, and destructions keep the world in darkness and gloom.

Are there areas of idolatry and areas of darkness and gloom in our lives? Jesus commands us in today's gospel, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." St. Paul says, "… that the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Jesus describes further the coming of the kingdom: "Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come" (Matthew 24:40-42).

We see also in today's gospel that the first four of Jesus' disciples were fishermen: Peter, Andrew, James, and John; men of humble background, who were among the unknowns at that time. By so doing, Jesus teaches us not to underrate anyone or underrate oneself. Jesus says in John 3:8, "The wind blows where it wills." God calls from all backgrounds. A major step that is required is to humbly detach oneself from whatever background one is and answer God's call. See how the disciples responded: Peter and Andrew:

“At once, they left their nets and followed him.” James and John: “… immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.”

It is symbolic that Jesus called fishermen as his first disciples. There are a lot to learn from fishermen. Traditional fishing is a painstaking job only embraced by strong and hardworking men. Fishermen cast their nets and wait patiently. They persevere by casting their nets over and over again. At the end of their fishing, they spend time sorting out fish from trash. Fishermen are courageous people. While many people are resting and sleeping at night, fishermen are in the waters fishing, sometimes, under unfavorable weather conditions. To make a good catch of fish, some fishermen sail to faraway deep waters. They are not deterred by dark nights, storms, tides, and dangerous water creatures. Let us pray that we may have these qualities of good fishermen in order to become good and effective disciples of Jesus and fishers of souls.

As Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John, so he calls us today. There is something God is calling us to do. Do we respond “at once” and “immediately” or do we continue to procrastinate or even reject the call?

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